

UPDATE ON OPT STEM EXTENSION RULE

In March 2016, The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) amended F-1 nonimmigrant student regulations on OPT for certain students with STEM degrees. The new rule, which provides for an extension of the OPT period by 24 months (a STEM OPT extension), will go into effect on May 10, 2016. Interested F-1 students must apply for and receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Please speak with an international student advisor if you want more guidance on this process by contacting our main office at (541) 737-6310 or emailing ois.student@oregonstate.edu.

Are You Eligible for the STEM OPT Extension?

DHS grants STEM OPT extensions to eligible F-1 students once per degree level, and now allows eligible students to participate in the STEM OPT extension twice over the course of their academic career. To participate twice in the STEM OPT extension, a student must earn a second qualifying degree at a higher education level, and be participating in an initial period of OPT at the time they apply to USCIS for their second STEM OPT extension. Students may not apply for STEM OPT extension during the 60-day grace period following an initial 12-month period of post-completion OPT.

Degree

To qualify for the STEM OPT extension, an F-1 student must currently be working in a period of post-completion OPT and must hold a bachelor's degree or higher in an [eligible STEM field](#) from an SEVP-certified school that is accredited at the time the student submits their STEM OPT extension application to USCIS.

Employer

In order to receive the STEM OPT extension, a student must pursue their practical training through an employer that is enrolled at USCIS' [E-Verify](#) employment eligibility verification program.

Application Process for STEM OPT

Eligible students should begin their application process by talking with an International Student Advisor (ISA) and submitting the STEM OPT extension request forms. After reviewing attending a **mandatory** STEM OPT Online appointment with an ISA, there are three steps to this process.

STEP 1-STEM OPT Extension Application

This step will collect information pertaining to your requested STEM OPT extension. Please complete the STEM [OPT Extension form](#) in its entirety and submit it to OIS.

STEP 2- Form I-983

The 2016 final rule that reinstates the 24-month STEM OPT regulations increases the educational benefits that F-1 students receive from their practical training experiences by requiring the submission of a formal training plan. The formal training plan must clearly articulate the STEM OPT student's learning objectives and affirm the employer's commitment to helping the student achieve those objectives. To fulfill this requirement, a student and their employer must complete and sign [Form I-983](#) and submit it to the student's DSO.

Applicants will download and complete Form-I-983. Please visit the link below to view the Form I-983 tutorial, which provides step-by-step guidance for completing the form. <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/assets/stem-opt-hub/story.html>

STEP 3- Reporting Compliance Confirmation

The final step in requesting a STEM OPT Recommendation is to confirm that you understand all reporting requirements while on the STEM OPT extension in the Affidavit of Understanding in the OPT STEM Extension packet. In order to maintain their legal F-1 status, a STEM OPT student must regularly check in with their DSO throughout the duration of the extension to validate Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) details and report changes made to the student's training plan.

Upon completion of the steps listed above, an Immigration advisor will review your application. If eligible, the advisor will issue a Form I-20 to submit with additional required materials to USCIS to determine a STEM OPT extension.

What Are the Student Reporting Requirements on STEM OPT?

Validating SEVIS Information

Every six months, a student must submit the STEM OPT employment confirmation form at <http://international.oregonstate.edu/isas/current-students/reporting> to confirm that the SEVIS record reflects current employment.

Annual Self Evaluations

Each STEM OPT student must submit an annual self-evaluation about the progress of their training experience to OIS. The evaluation is included in Form I-983. Students and their employers must sign the student's self-evaluation before the student submits it.

Material Changes to an Existing Form I-983

Each STEM OPT student must report to OIS any of the following changes to Form I-983:

- Any change of the employer's EIN.
- Any reduction in student compensation that is not tied to a reduction in hours worked.
- Any significant decrease in hours per week that a student engages in a STEM training opportunity.
- Changes to the employer's commitments or student's learning objectives as documented on Form I-983.

Changing Employers & Unemployment

When a STEM OPT student changes employers, the new employer must be enrolled in E-Verify before the student begins work for pay. The student must also submit a new Form I-983 to OIS within 10 days of starting the new practical training opportunity.

STEM OPT students must report the termination of their practical training experience within 10 days of the event. Students who are granted a 24-month STEM OPT extension are allowed an additional 60 days of unemployment beyond the initial post-completion OPT limit, for a total of 150 days of allowable unemployment.

Employer Noncompliance

If a STEM OPT student believes that their STEM OPT employer is not complying with the terms and conditions of the 24-month STEM OPT extension regulations (the Form I-983 instructions and the completed Form I-983 on file in OIS), the student may contact the Student and Exchange Visitor Program at the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement by following the instructions found on <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub>.